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ABSTRACT

The associations between growing up in a family disrupted by divorce and the interpersonal orientations of young adults were investigated in a survey of white college students (N=1720). The majority of subjects (89%) came from intact homes. Subjects from divorced families (N=106) had a more external locus of control and felt lonelier than those from intact families. An investigation of the interacting influences of siblings and family intactness indicated that the impact of siblings was limited to that associated with sibling status, not family size. Middle-born subjects from divorced families scored lower on perceived popularity and internality than those from intact families. Results suggest that growing up in a nonintact family is associated with a relatively negative personality pattern for young adults. (Author/NRB)

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SOME CONSEQUENCES OF GROWING UP IN A NONINTACT FAMILY

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Some Consequences of Growing Up in a Nonintact Family[1]

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Presented at the Annual Convention of the APA, Montreal, 1980

A survey was conducted to examine the associations between growing up in a family disrupted by divorce and the interpersonal orientations of young adults. The interacting influences of siblings and family intactness were also studied. The majority (89%) of the subjects (1720 white undergraduates) came from intact homes. The results indicated that subjects from divorced families had a more external locus of control and felt lonelier than those from intact families. The impact of siblings was limited to that associated with sibling status, not family size. Middle borns from divorced families scored lower on perceived popularity and internality than middle borns from intact families. Caution in overgeneralizing these results is urged.

Considerable attention has been focused on evaluating the psychological consequences for children of growing up in families disrupted by divorce. Although much of the research in this area indicates that children from nonintact families are at a disadvantage relative to children from intact families, the methodological flaws of much of this research make firm conclusions about the long-term consequences of growing up in a nonintact family impossible (Herzog & Sudia, 1968; Kulka & Weingarten, 1979; Shinn, 1978).

Even less is known about the general interpersonal orientation of young adults who have spent at least part of their childhood in a family disrupted by divorce. Compared to people from intact families, are young adults from nonintact families different in terms of their feelings of peer and self acceptance? social isolation? locus of control? One purpose of this study is to answer these questions.

Another purpose of the present study is to examine the interactive effects of the presence of siblings with the experience of coming from a nonintact family on the interpersonal orientation of young adults. Only a small quantity of research has studied the interacting influences of siblings and family intactness. For the most part, these studies have been limited to determining whether an older brother can substitute for an absent father (Biller, 1976). Other types of sibling effects have not been examined. For example, are the effects associated with coming from a nonintact family more extreme for only children than they are for children with siblings? Are children from larger families less affected by changes in the adult composition of the family than children from smaller families? Such questions will be answered by this study.

Undergraduates (841 males; 944 females), ranging in age from 17 to 21 years, were paid for participating in a survey which was advertised in the student newspaper. Participation took approximately 40 minutes and consisted of completing a series of objective personality instruments and a background questionnaire. Since the majority (96%) of the original sample were white (specifically Anglo), nonwhites were eliminated from the sample, leaving 1720 subjects. Variations from this sample size, mentioned in the results, are due to missing data.

The majority (89%) of the subjects reported being reared continuously from birth by both their biological parents. Such subjects are regarded here as coming from an intact family. The 106 undergraduates from families disrupted by divorce were divided into three types. These were: (1) those who grew up with a single parent (N=4), (2) those who grew up with

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stepparents (N=48), and (3) those who spent their childhoods with a mixture of other adults (usually relatives) in combination with single or stepparents (N=54). Given the small number of subjects in each of the divorced family categories, it was decided that they should be combined to form one single group, entitled "nonintact." However, to help justify this combination, multiple one-way analyses of variance were conducted to determine if any of these groups differed from the others in terms of the dependent variables considered in this study. None of these comparisons were statistically significant.

Within the total sample, the average level of mother's education was "some college, but no degree," and the average occupation of fathers was lower professional and managerial. Mother's education ranged from some high school to a graduate degree, and father's occupation ranged from rural or domestic worker to highly paid and educated professional. Both mother's education and father's occupation were used here as indices of socioeconomic status. Family size ranged from one to thirteen children.

The background questionnaire contained items which assessed the number of siblings, sibling status, mother's education, father's occupation, and family intactness. The latter was measured by a series of items. All subjects were asked, "were you brought up continuously from birth by your natural (biological) parents?" For those who answered No, this item was followed by additional items which assessed the reasons for this response. Perceived popularity was also assessed by a questionnaire item: "How popular do you feel? Answers ranged from very popular to very unpopular on a four-point scale. Feelings of loneliness were assessed by the item: "How often do you feel lonely?" Answers ranged from very often to never on a five-point scale.

Self-esteem was measured by the short form of the Texas Social Behavior Inventory (Helmreich & Stapp, 1974). This 16 item scale was selected because it measures an interpersonal aspect of self-esteem, a social self-confidence. Locus of control was measured by a modified version of Rotter's I-E scale (Rotter, 1966). This modification allowed for the separate measurement of internality from externality. The modification consisted of taking each of the 46 items from the original measure and asking subjects to express their agreement with these items by using a five-point scale.

In order to test the hypotheses of the study, five stepwise multiple regression analyses were conducted. The predictor variables were: Number of Siblings (Family Size), Sibling Status (only, first, middle, and last borns), Family Status (Intact vs Nonintact), Mother's Education, Gender and all the interactions of these five variables. The five criterion variables were: internality, externality, self-esteem, popularity, and loneliness. The same analyses were repeated with father's occupation instead of mother's education as an index of social class. Since the results were the same regardless of the social class measure used, only the results with mother's education as a variable are reported.

The results indicated that for externality and loneliness, the only significant F to Enter was produced by Family Status. Specifically, it was found that young adults from nonintact families scored more external, $F(1,1487)=5.57$, $p = .02$, and lonelier, $F(1,1487)=9.32$, $p = .002$, than their counterparts from intact families. The means were: externality, Intact $\bar{X}=79.40$, Nonintact $\bar{X}=82.17$; loneliness, Intact $\bar{X}=2.86$, Nonintact $\bar{X}=3.22$.

For the remaining three analyses, the only significant F to Enter was produced by the interaction between Sibling and Family Status. Specifically, the Fs associated with these interaction terms were: internality, $F(1,1487)=8.14$, $p = .004$; self-esteem, $F(1,1487)=8.90$, $p = .003$; popularity, $F(1,1487)=9.52$, $p = .002$. The means for these interactions and the distribution of subjects by family and sibling statuses are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Distribution of Subjects and Mean Internality, Self-Esteem, and Popularity by Sibling and Family Status

Variable	Family Status	Sibling Status Only	First	Middle	Last
Distribution of subjects	Intact	183	419	498	414
	Nonintact	24	31	28	23
Internality	Intact	87.73	86.75	86.65	85.60
	Nonintact	87.63	86.56	81.71	85.82
Self-Esteem	Intact	59.38	59.75	59.36	58.54
	Nonintact	57.96	60.97	56.35	55.70
Popularity	Intact	1.96	1.96	2.00	2.04
	Nonintact	2.12	2.03	2.22	2.18

Note: Higher internality and self-esteem scores represent a more internal locus of control and higher self-esteem. Lower popularity scores represent greater perceived popularity.

To aid in the interpretation of these three interactions, planned comparisons were conducted comparing the mean responses of members of intact families to those from nonintact families within each sibling status. The results of these analyses indicated that the interactions between sibling and family status were accounted for primarily by middle borns from nonintact families. That is, only the middle born analyses produced significant differences between intact and nonintact families. Middle borns from nonintact families scored less internal, $F(1,509)=3.90$, $p = .05$, and less popular, $F(1,521)=4.71$, $p = .03$, than middle borns from intact families. The middle born effect for self-esteem was only of borderline significance, $F(1,519)=2.59$, $p = .10$.

These results are noteworthy because they indicate that growing up in a nonintact family is associated with a relatively negative personality pattern for young adults. In particular, young adults from nonintact families scored more external and reported feeling lonelier than their peers from intact families. The externality finding is consistent with previous speculation about the long-term impact of divorce on children. Kulka and Weingarten (1979) have suggested that because children of divorced parents experience a major life disruption over which they have no control, they are likely to develop an external locus of control. Similarly, the loneliness finding is consistent with previous survey results. Shaver and Rubenstein (in press) found that adults who grew up in families disrupted

by divorce reported feeling lonelier than adults from intact families and they attributed this difference to the destructive impact that divorce has on the early attachments between parent and child. They argued that one consequence of these disrupted attachments is that the child acquires a chronic feeling of loneliness.

Note also that sibling status interacted with the effects associated with coming from a nonintact family. The results indicate that only middle borns from nonintact families are handicapped in terms of perceived popularity, internality, and self-esteem. Future research should be devoted to replicating these results and determining the psychological mechanisms that bring them about.

Note that despite the relatively wide range of mothers' educations and fathers' occupations present in the sample, these measures of socioeconomic status had no effects on the results of this study.

In conclusion, the results of this study should be interpreted with caution. Although the effects were statistically significant, they were small in overall magnitude, accounting for less than one percent of the variance. Note also that coming from a nonintact family was uncommon in this sample; therefore, the subjects growing up in nonintact families could have felt "different." Such a self-assessment could hinder a child's development of a sense of peer acceptance and self-esteem. Finally, it is possible that the negative effects associated with coming from a nonintact family were found here because the subjects in this study were relatively young adults. Previous research examining the long-term impact of divorce on children has reported that this influence abates as the young adult matures (Kulka & Weingarten, 1979).

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